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## Lost chances in Afghanistan, the forgotten killing fields

Frankfurter Allgemeine

The war in Afghanistan has been going on for seven years. The West has grown so used to the idea of killing fields somewhere or other in far-off Asia that few any longer care.

People there would do better to sue for peace with the Soviet Union, which they can't hope to beat in the long run, the argument goes.

The feeling is that the war is madness and people are allowing themselves to be led to the slaughter. It is that the Americans are letting them go because they are enjoying the spectacle of life being made difficult for the Russians.

These are the terms in which mention, if any, is made of Afghanistan — even though Western politicians may still occasionally trundle out their appeals to the Russians to withdraw their troops and restore the country's neutral, non-aligned status.

What, in any case, can we do? This question, and the helplessness which it

Soviet leaders that it was not prepared to accept the incorporation of Afghanistan in the Soviet empire.

Open Soviet intervention in Afghanistan began in April 1978 (covert intervention much earlier still), and not on 27 December 1979, by when the take-over was almost complete.

Yet even then there would still have been time for an imaginative counter-strategy. But no serious attempt has ever been made to devise one.

Instead Western activities have consisted mainly of supplying the millions of refugees who spilled over into Pakistan and Iran when the Soviet troops moved in.

At least part of the human suffering caused by the war in Afghanistan was eased in this way, but it would have been more important to help the Afghan resistance, and civilians who chose to stay in Afghanistan, in their desperate struggle, and to do so politically and, as far as possible, militarily.

But the West lacked the courage to do this. Its support for the Afghan resistance, the mujaheddin, the Islamic warriors, has always been half-hearted, fearful and thus, in the long term, fairly ineffectual.

The West has suffered as a result. Its inability to provide effective assistance has disappointed and embittered the military and political leaders of the Afghan resistance.

They will no longer have much truck with Western politicians or the West-



A flickering in the dark.

ern way of life. Some have taken to making no bones about their anti-Western views.

The mujaheddin are also disappointed in many of their fellow-Muslims, not to mention governments of the non-aligned movement, whose help has consisted mainly of annual votes at the UN General Assembly calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan.

Some non-aligned countries are not even prepared to back this resolution at the UN.

All in all the conclusions to be reached at the end of seven years of war in Afghanistan are depressing.

## Sakharov: a new Kremlin? Or a case of new tactics?

Kölnischer Stadt-Anzeiger

Andrei Sakharov's release from domestic exile is only one of several news stories from the Soviet Union.

But it is the one creating the greatest interest in the West — more so than criticisms of the late Mr Brezhnev and the unrest in Kazakhstan.

Sakharov did nothing more than call for international coexistence in peace and freedom and was subjected to seven years of exile and terror as a result.

An outstanding nuclear physicist who was largely responsible for designing the Soviet hydrogen bomb and earned the highest Soviet awards, he raised his voice in warning, like many fellow-physicists in the West, against the weapon of mass murder he had helped to develop.

As he also called more and more insistently for a democratisation of the socialist system he was not only put out to graze but ostracised and terrorised. Yet he refused to recant.

The new Soviet leaders' decision to let him return to Moscow and resume his work there is doubtless due in part to pressure exerted by the West.

His story is a spectacular one. So his release must not make us readier to forget the fate of many other, less well-known and perhaps less interesting Soviet dissidents.

Yet the Soviet move remains remarkable and is worth noting because it could be symptomatic of endeavours to reform the Soviet regime.

Whether the unrest in Kazakhstan is similarly symptomatic is another matter.

It may have been fomented by an old Party clique in a bid to avoid being Continued on page 2

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reveals, is often the only answer that occurs to Western politicians when Afghans and their sympathisers in Europe and America appeal to them not to let the Soviet Union get away with it.

Western policy over Afghanistan has been one of helplessness all along. Beginning with the coup in Kabul in April 1978, the significance of which was not then appreciated.

The West should have protested straight away and made it clear to the

(Cartoon: Walter Hanel/Kölnischer Stadt-Anzeiger)

Militarily the Afghan resistance is not yet beaten, but it is hard-pressed by Soviet superiority, which is beginning to tell.

The resistance is still inadequately equipped in terms of both quality and quantity of weapons, especially anti-aircraft weapons with which to challenge Russia's undisputed supremacy in the air.

It must also look on helplessly as the Soviet leaders gradually gain political ground too.

The Afghans are subjected to increasingly severe burdens. Air raids have grown even more devastating. Increasing pressure is exerted by the Kabul authorities while the mujaheddin also claim loyalty.

Time is on the Russians' side. They have not yet succeeded in full, but virtually everything is proceeding according to plan.

There is less and less international debate about the war in Afghanistan and more and more people are coming to terms with the Soviet Union establishing itself in Afghanistan for good.

Supporters of the kind of political solution for Afghanistan advocated by the Soviet Union are gaining ground.

This "political solution" would amount to recognition of what the Soviet leaders term irreversible revolutionary changes in Afghan society.

This may not happen overnight, but the Russians have reason to hope it may come to gain acceptance in the foreseeable future.

It is little short of a miracle that the resistance still survives despite these vicissitudes. Its courage, fortitude and strength of belief are admirable.

But if it is left to its own devices its future nonetheless looks bleak.

Klaus Natorp

(Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung für Deutschland, 22 December 1986)













